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Zeroes

Richard Zabransky
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ZEROES

Richard Zabransky

They came out of the east, you said,
where the clouds turnip on the horizon
and the sun is a welder's flare.

At first you thought it was the hangover
from trying to forget the wahini,
or a formation too geometric for gulls.

Then you heard the sound
of grasshoppers caught in a paper bag,
the mantra of an empire.

With a ladder, you could have
climbed to see your reflection
on the shadowless faces of the boys,
but, instead, the world turned upside down
as your head rotated back
in the afterdraft of their wake.

You told me about them
the night of the draft lottery,
the night they picked us for Vietnam;

funny, I thought,
how much zeroes mean,
the kind that hold count in a line of figures,
or the kind buried in the pupils
of eyes that are never seen
yet which foreshadow our lifetimes.

From where you stood,
you could see the smoke from Pearl
blossoming like a hybrid
of cuttlefish and midnight.
You mashed out your Lucky
and headed for base.

Today, we invaded Panama
and received accounts of acceptable losses.
Deemed Operation Just Cause
by Rather, Brokaw, and Jennings,
we watched together,
zapping channels.

A young marine threw the same grenade
three times —
you said he'd have a great fastball,
and I imagined a perfect game,
another string of zeroes
placed in the record books.